ONE FLESH

"Doctor, how bad is it?"

"Under normal circumstances, serious but not critical. Here--now--there's nothing I can do."

There was a sound of flesh coming violently together with flesh, fist and palm beating out a rhythm of frustration.

"There is always something that can be done."

The other gave a long, ragged sigh. "Not this time, Spock. I'm sorry."

The words came to him faintly, as if from a great distance. He was aware, somehow, that Spock and Bones were talking about him, and that their disagreement held an ultimate importance for him. He didn't seem to be able to focus on it, though, or on much of anything except that the sun was gone and the stars were out, which was distinctly odd because it had been daylight just a few minutes before, a bright hot day at noon, not the kind of day or time, certainly, that a sensible person would choose to be running from hostile primitives armed with slug-throwers, but nonetheless the sort of day and time in which they had been forced to do just that, and then something had hit him, hard, in the belly, and a moment later something had slammed into his head, and he had fallen down into this dark place and was drifting in the black emptiness between suns.... The stars about him began to move, ever so slowly at first, sweeping past him in a majectic arc as the galactic wheel turned, and somewhere a great chord sounded, Fortune rota volvitur, chanted the red-robed monks as they danced and the wheel began to turn faster, faster, always faster, until the axle gave with a crash like a thousand trumpets and the stars broke away and fell with him, past him, through him, down into the nothingness where the universe began, space itself breaking up around him, falling, in great black soft flakes like snow....

My lord, what a morning.

"Yes, this time. Think, Doctor. Alternatives always exist. What is needed in this instance?"

"A miracle."

Silence.

"All right." Grudgingly. "I need an operating room, or a reasonable substitute. A kitchen table would do, except we don't have one. And I need surgical instruments, and an anaesthetic, and a good supply of O Positive human blood. Know where I can get any of that out here in the middle of nowhere?"

"Those things are unavailable, Doctor." There was a snort, but the voice went calmly on. "Therefore other means must be employed to achieve the desired end."

"The desired end is to keep Jim from bleeding to death from a bullet in his gut. What am I supposed to stop the hemorrhage with? My finger, like the little Dutch boy? Blast it, Spock, don't you think I'd do something if I could?"

"I know you would, Doctor." The voice was very gentle. Then, briskly. "The head injury?"

"A graze. Just enough to knock him out." A pause. "We ought to be grateful for it. That other wound is going to be hellishly painful when he comes to. If he comes to."

"I see. Nothing that should not prove manageable."

"Manageable? What do you mean, manageable? Spock!" There was fear in the cry. "What do you think you're doing?"

"Preparing to apply available means to the attainment of the desired end. Silence would be helpful, Doctor."

Boot soles scraped against gravel. "You could both die, you realize that."

"Understood. Now, if you please...."

He was alone in the dark. The stars were gone, flung with all their worlds and peoples out beyond the edge of the universe, dopplered out, vanished, gone. Worlds without end, all at an end, amen. Dead. Like he was (?), had been (?), would be (?). Tell me how long ol' Jim's been gone. Pity. Bones wouldn't like losing his favorite customer. And Spock-- Oh my God, Spock-- Fragmentary images, a face on a record tape--Vulcan, Tholia, Gideon-- But not even fear could exist here. The